

Ask Him These

Forty question groups for recording a brother's stories. Start with permission.

ROBERT W. LINN, PM · BOSLEY PRESS

Choose a willing narrator and a quiet, comfortable setting. Explain that this is an oral-history interview. Consent to a listening survey or its notes is not consent to this recording. Ask one part of a question at a time; the numbered groups on the next two pages are a route, not a script.

Before recording: write down the agreement

Agree who may access the source, where each copy will live, any storage or transcription service, excluded topics, and how to request a restriction or removal. Both sign and keep the same record. Page 8 of Let Him Talk revision 2 provides a fuller form; an equivalent clear agreement is also possible. Check applicable recording rules and any required lodge or archive forms.

No publication or wider sharing follows automatically. A family copy, lodge playback, newsletter or archive deposit needs approval of the exact version, recipient and use. A date passing, silence or death does not authorize new sharing. Do not promise complete recall of copies already released.

Invitation and recorded opening

"Would you sit with me and tell me about the people and nights you remember? We will agree first on recording, copies and access. You may skip questions, pause or stop. Sharing beyond that agreement needs your separate approval."

After agreement, test both voices, then record the narrator's name or agreed alias, interviewer, interview ID, date and general location. Do not speak a home address. Ask: "Do you agree to recording and keeping this interview under the agreement we just reviewed?" Wait for a clear yes. If there is uncertainty, stop and resolve it.

Listen without steering the answer

Use short, open prompts. Leave comfortable silence; there is no compulsory word count or eight-second wait. Do not compete with your own memories or finish sentences. Note factual differences and verify later; preserve his account and label corrections separately. If he becomes upset, offer a pause, stop or change of topic. Do not assume what tears mean.

Keep private ritual and confidential matters off the recording. Pause promptly if they arise. Record any restriction or removal request by file and time range, stop use, and track the action across controlled copies and derivatives. Do not repeat sensitive content in a public index.

Before leaving, then after the interview

Confirm that the file saved and plays. Record the interview ID, date, general location, people present, duration, filenames and permission status. Transfer by an agreed method and verify the copies. Aim for three copies on independent storage, one off site. Index file names and time ranges; label possible excerpts as unapproved until separately reviewed.

Ask Him These is free to copy and adapt for lodge use. It accompanies Let Him Talk, first edition, corrected revision 2 (September 30, 2026). The full guide contains recording, specific-use and removal records, plus the interview log, backup register and time index. Guide information: brotherhoodofpurpose.com. Not a Grand Lodge publication.

The questions, part 1 of 2

Begin with him, then the lodge. Ask one part at a time and follow his lead.

Before the lodge

1. "Where did you grow up, and what did your folks do?"
2. "What brought you to this town, or kept you here?"
3. "What was the town like then? Where did men work?"
4. "What did you do for a living, and how did you come to it?"
5. "Were you in the service? Where did that take you?"

Finding the lodge

6. "Who asked you to join, or who did you ask? Tell me about him."
7. "What did you know about Masons before that? What did your family think?"
8. "What do you remember about the night you were initiated, apart from the work itself? Who was there? How did you feel driving home?"
9. "Who taught you your proficiency? What was he like?"
10. "When did you first feel you belonged?"

The men

11. "Who is the brother you miss most? Tell me about him."
12. "Who ran things when you came in? How?"
13. "Who was the character everybody has a story about? Tell me one."
14. "Who did the work nobody saw?"
15. "Who took you under his wing, and what did he teach you that was not in the book?"

An ordinary night

16. "Walk me through a stated meeting in [decade]. What time did you get there? Where did you park? Who was in the kitchen?"
17. "Where did you sit? Who sat next to you?"
18. "What did the building smell like? What was the light like?"
19. "What did you eat? Who cooked?"
20. "What happened after the meeting closed? Where did the visiting happen?"

If he does not know where to start

Offer a concrete detail: who made the coffee, where he sat, or who appears in a photograph. Follow with "Tell me more," "What happened next?" or "How did you understand it then?"

The questions, part 2 of 2

The events, hard parts and hopes. Finish with names and next steps.

The big moments

21. "Tell me about the building: when you came, what changed, what happened to it."
22. "The fire, the flood, the sale, the merger, the move, the parade, the anniversary. Which of those did you live through? Start with one."
23. "What was the best year the lodge ever had while you were in it? What made it that?"
24. "What was the worst? What got you through?"
25. "Was there a night you will never forget? What happened?"

The lodge and the town

26. "What did the lodge do in this town that people knew about? What did it do that nobody knew about? What did the town think of the Masons?"
27. "Without naming private circumstances, how did the lodge support people through difficulty?"
28. "How did the lodge fit with the church, the mill, the base, the Legion, the Elks?"

The hard parts

29. "Tell me about a disagreement that mattered. How did it end?"
30. "Was there a time you nearly quit? What kept you, or brought you back?"
31. "What did the lodge get wrong, in your time?"
32. "Is there something you wish you had done differently?"

Carrying it forward

33. "What do you hope a brother fifty years from now understands about this lodge?"
34. "What would you say to the man being raised next month?"
35. "What is the one thing that should never change here? What is the one thing that should?"
36. "What did the lodge give you that nothing else did?"

Housekeeping, always last

37. "Spell for me the names you mentioned: [read your list]."
38. "Do you have photographs, programs, or papers the lodge should copy? May I come back with a camera?"
39. "Who else should I sit with?"
40. "May I call you if I have a question when I write this up?"

A good ending

Ask whether anything should be restricted or removed, confirm any next contact he wants, and offer his own copy through an agreed method. The questions themselves give no permission to record, publish or copy a photograph. Keep each permission with the relevant material.